SINGAPORE: You've heard or experienced it all, the good and the bad that service in Singapore has to offer. Now, here are credible statistics to back the anecdotes — and the numbers paint a picture of a somewhat satisfied customer.

Based on a new, comprehensive measure of customer contentment, the city of the smiling Singa scored a "healthy" 68.7 out of 100 on the national average satisfaction scale. Other developed countries scored in the 70s.

A first in Singapore, the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG) — developed by the Institute of Service Excellence (Ises) and the Singapore Workforce Development Agency (WDA) — includes the views of both residents and tourists, on eight key economic sectors.

Of the individual entities that stood out, the national carrier took pride of place. Thanking its customers, a Singapore Airlines spokesperson told TODAY it had invested "substantial resources in training" its staff to keep customers happy and was "honoured to have topped the survey".

Less satisfied, however, were those who ranked Singapore's two healthcare clusters, the National Healthcare Group and SingHealth, near the bottom of the overall list. For instance, in terms of polyclinic service, they scored 60.5 and 64.7 respectively.

With the issue of long queues having repeatedly made the news, consumers like band instructor Goh Koon Chuan, 36, were not surprised polyclinics fared badly. "Their waiting times are long," he groused.

While the transportation and logistics sector was ranked third, one of its sub-sectors — public buses — scored a low 64.3. SBS Transit said: "We are of course disappointed that we did not do better and this will definitely spur us to do better."

Most consumers were not surprised at the sector rankings, especially with tourism coming in first. But market researcher Eugene Fok, 25, did not expect telecommunications to take bottom place, while housewife Ms Cynthia Sin, 47, felt the scoring for public buses was harsh. "I depend on public transport, and I think it is quite efficient," she said.

While Singapore's national average is healthy, there is some catching up to do, said Ises director Caroline Lim. South Korea and the United States, which use the same model, scored 72 and 75 respectively.

South Korea had scored 58.8 when it launched the index in 1998 but has moved "steadily upward" since, said Ms Lim, adding that Singapore can do likewise.

Interestingly, tourists gave higher scores than residents did. Most tourists came from Indonesia, China and Australia, said Ms Lim, and when they compare against their experiences at home, "they would rate Singapore higher".

That Singaporeans could have higher expectations was also a "possibility". Even so, only 6.3 per cent of respondents had complained to a company at least once in the last three or six months — compared with the US' 14 per cent.

This could be due to US consumers being more vocal, or there being more well-established feedback channels and a faster service-recovery culture in the US, said Ises, which comes under the Singapore Management University (SMU). The key to customer satisfaction, findings showed, depended on how well a company handled the complaint.
The CSISG is an international gold standard based on the American Customer Satisfaction Index, said Ises, which co-funded the $1-million survey with the WDA. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with 10,229 households and 2,159 tourists between May 1 and July 23 last year. The survey took into account how customers’ expectations and the quality of products or services affected their satisfaction.

Acting Minister for Manpower Gan Kim Yong said good service skills will become a critical asset and a competitive advantage for Singapore. "The CSISG is not just a barometer of customer satisfaction. It is a diagnostic tool that allows companies to understand, compare, improve and monitor their customer service over time," he said, challenging companies to score above 70 within three years.

The results will be posted at www.smu.edu.sg. Data collection for CSISG 2008 will begin in mid-year, and will expand to include other sub-sectors, such as insurance.

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